

NATIONAL YOUTH ART AWARDS 2026

WAIKATO SOCIETY OF ARTS

NATIONAL YOUTH ART AWARDS 2026

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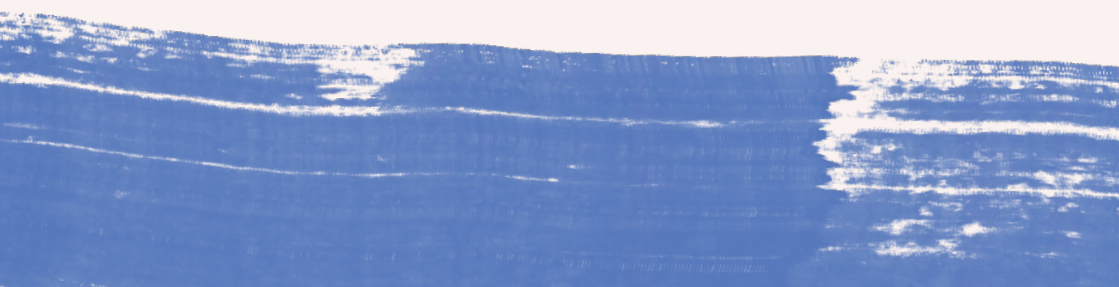
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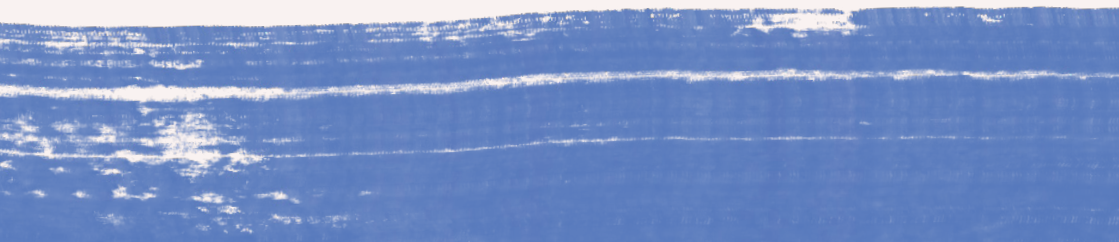


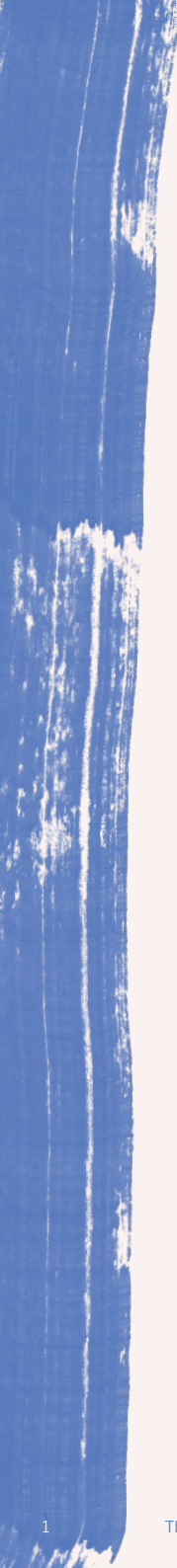
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The JUDGES

AISHA ROBERTS

Aisha Roberts (Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāti Raukawa) is the Pou Tiaki Toi (Collections Curator) at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, where she is responsible for the care and management of Te Kōpuni Kura, the organisation's national art collection. Working across multiple sites, her role includes collection care, exhibition development, and supporting the placement and interpretation of artworks within learning environments. She particularly values opportunities to support and work alongside new and emerging artists.

Aisha has two decades of experience in the arts and culture sector, beginning her career in a museum context working in imaging and collection care.

Alongside her curatorial work, she maintains a creative practice with a background in photography and, since 2020, has been developing her practice as a weaver.

She is pleased to be part of the judging panel for the National Youth Art Awards, recognising the importance of supporting young artists as they develop their ideas and creative voice.





TYRONE TE WAA

Tyrone Te Waa (Ngāti Tūwharetoa), born 1992, likens his preparations for art-making to foraging before cooking. His exuberant palette of materials — wood, fabric, paint and string — is found or gifted, then assembled through methods of binding, knotting, felting and wrapping to make wearable and unwearable objects, wall works and installations.

His autobiographical and ancestral reflection is informed by research into takatāpui/gay/queer histories in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In 2021 Te Waa completed a Master of Creative Practice at Unitec Institute of Technology Te Whare Wānanga o Wairaka. In 2022 he received an Arts Foundation of New Zealand Te Tumu Toi Springboard Award. Recent exhibitions include: How to Make a Home, Objectspace (2024); Kumara Kuīni (NZ Idol) Awards Ceremony in Aotearoa Contemporary, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki (2024), Te Rūma Moenga / The Mattress Room (Memory Foam), Casula Powerhouse (2024), WiWi WāWā, Anna Miles Gallery, 2023 and Whetūrangitia/Made As Stars, Dowse Art Museum (2022).

Finalists

13-14

Acrylic
700mm x 700mm x 5mm
\$600



Aaron Liu

1. THE PAINTER'S PAUSE

My work explores the process of developing and expressing ideas that artists go through when they are painting.

Adrian Jacome

2. STRING OF BALANCE

This painting explores my journey of immigration, showing two versions of myself. One version remains attached to the memories and family of Ecuador, while the other represents the life I have built in Aotearoa. The door symbolizes the choice between holding on to the past or embracing change.



Oil Painting
600mm x 500mm x 15mm
\$500

Alex Zhong

3. THE ABSTRACTIONS OF REALITY

Abstraction and reality meet where emotion is drawn. The heart, placed as a symbol of vulnerability, blooms across the page in uniform dimensions. It encompasses my emotions, thoughts, and identity, acting as a personal guide that shapes how I perceive, interpret, and create within the world around me.



Acrylic & Oil on Canvas
400mm x 400mm x 1mm
\$125

Painting
590mm x 840mm x 15mm
\$125



Amethyst Wu

4. IN TOO DEEP

Sometimes we end up sinking deeper than one
can swim up themselves.

Watercolour, Coloured Pencils
265mm x 375mm x 1mm
\$250



Cassia You

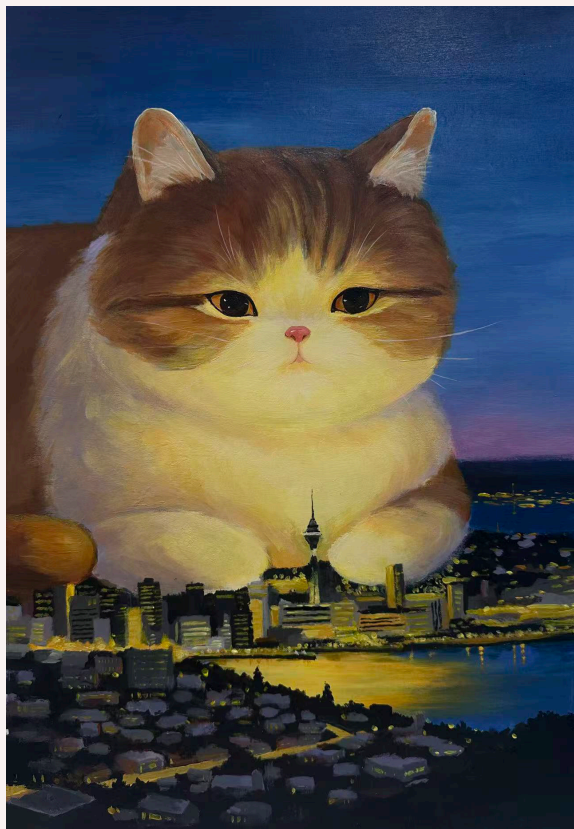
5. BEYOND THE CRACKS

There're ducks standing on top of each other, above a cracked, lifeless land where survival becomes impossible. Still, they remain together, refusing to abandon one another. Their journey reflects the reality of homelessness, where in a life that often turns away, compassion becomes life's most precious resource.

Eva Zhu

6. HARBOUR LIGHTS

Bathed in the golden glow of city lights, a colossal feline watches peacefully over Auckland as night falls. Perched above the harbour, serving as a silent guardian, preserving harmony and calm while the city rests below. The contrast between the cat's presence and the delicate urban landscape evokes a sense of protection, serenity, and quiet strength.



Painting
290mm x 420mm x 15mm
\$125

Lucia Zhang

7. SECOND SKIN

My piece “Second Skin” relates to consumer culture and identity. It shows a man crouched in a vulnerable position, with supermarket plastic bags encasing him entirely, symbolising the environmental damage we have caused, which inspired me to create this piece.



Unknown
255mm x 365mm x 1mm
\$250

Painting, Oil, Acrylic, & Ink
900mm x 610mm x 35mm
\$950

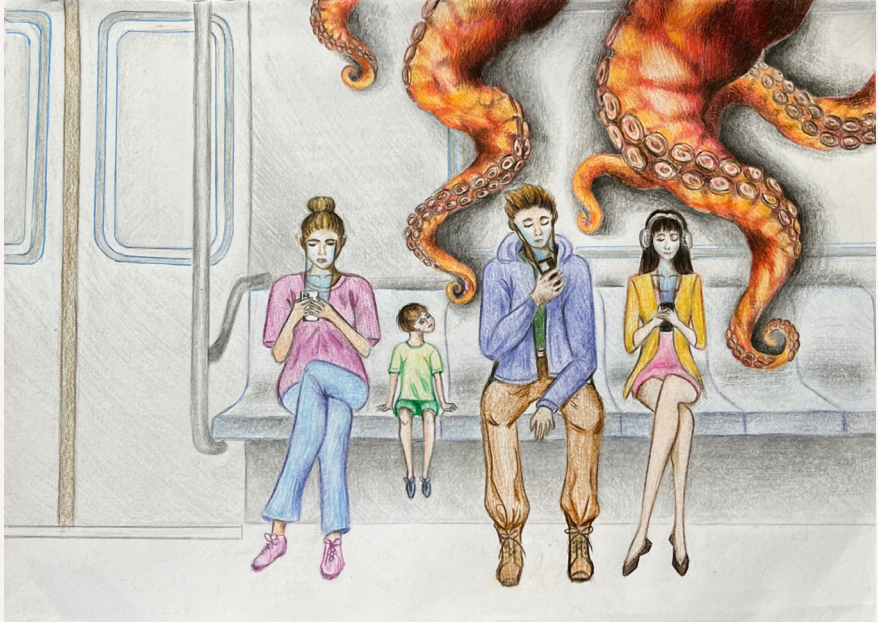


Olive Galea

8. UNHUMAN

Driven by kaitiakitanga, this painting honours the untamed, ancient spirit of New Zealand's native forests. Through intricate swirls and interwoven layers, I recreate the dense, pathless energy of the bush. This ethereal ecosystem stands as a sanctuary, a living contrast to our rigid, industrial reality.

Drawing, Coloured Pencil
210mm x 297mm x 1mm
\$150



Selina Xi

9. DISCONNECTED

Through my drawing, 'Disconnect', I wanted to show modern everyday life, where people disappear into glowing screens, blinding themselves to the worlds' wonders and horrors. Screens are taking over our lives. We need to disconnect, look up, and witness the living world through our own eyes.

Shya Verhoeven

10. A MOMENT OF QUIET REFLECTION

My grandma, as I see her. Thoughtful, strong, and deeply loved. I wanted to honour who she is to me. She is comfort. She is home.

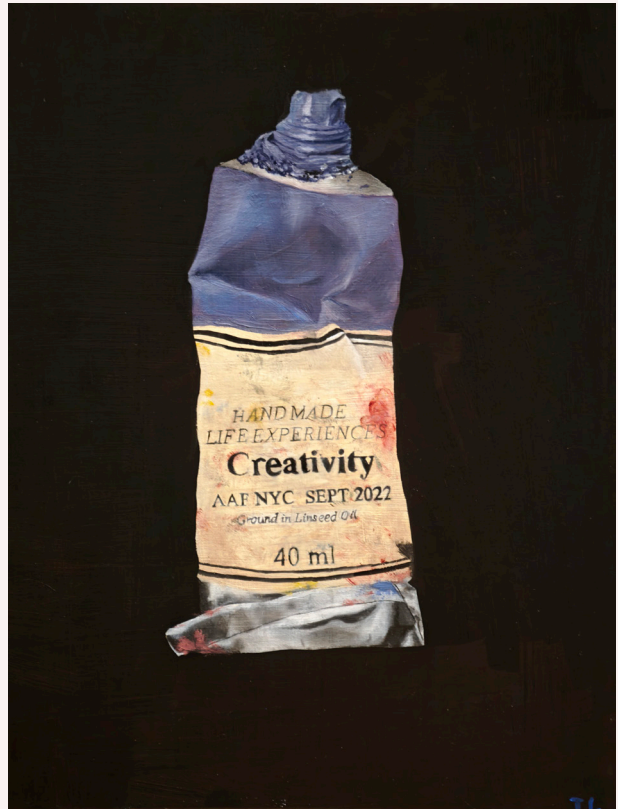


Pencil Drawing
530mm x 730mm x 30mm
\$125

Tehya Liu

11. SQUEEZE GENTLY

This paint tube holds endless potential. Titled Squeeze Gently. Every idea, whether a “bad” one born from past failure or a “good” one shaped by success, has value. To create, we must gently squeeze every shade of our lived experience.



Oil Paint
400mm x 500mm x 15mm
\$625

Painting, oil on canvas
400mm x 300mm x 2mm
\$400



Vanessa Li

12. GAZE

This painting explores the feeling of liminality I experience when staring at fish and having it stare back at me. I feel that I'm equal to the fish. If we were two creatures watching each other. I wonder if humans are different from animals, and what differentiates me from fish.

Painting, acrylic on panel
400mm x 300mm x 2mm
\$400



Vanessa Li

13. WHEN CHAIRS SWIM

I was inspired by the common phenomenon today where children's roles are chosen by adults. I used the role reversal of chairs becoming fish, swimming, while fish become chairs, grounded on the floor. It symbolizes uselessness, highlighting how beings can lose their purpose when placed in roles they were never meant for.

Willow Zhang

14. COLLECTED SENTIMENTS

My artwork is a still life drawing of everyday objects found around the home. I focused on using tone and shading to make the objects look realistic and three-dimensional. This piece shows how ordinary objects can have meaning and become interesting when carefully observed and drawn.



Sketch
297mm x 420mm
\$750

Yomi Lai

15. MY LITTLE SISTER

When my sister was a baby, she was full of curiosity and loved exploring the world around her. One day, she found a pair of headphones on the ground and put them on herself. They were far too big for her, but she looked incredibly endearing. This drawing captures a fleeting moment of innocence, curiosity, and discovery.



Drawing
297mm x 420mm
\$250

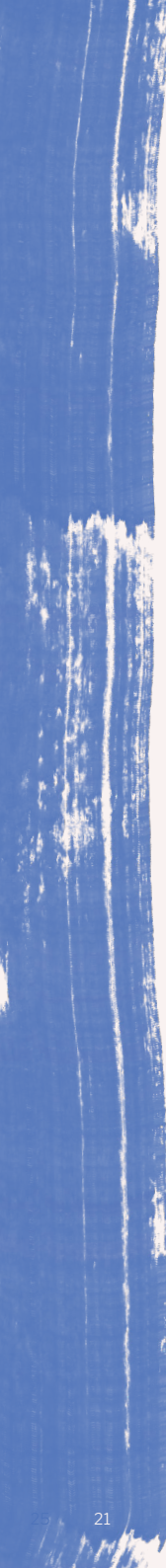
Unknown
600mm x 800mm x 2mm
\$1,200



Yuri Ahn

16. WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN

This is a painted moment in time, where years from now planet earth is decimated and sucked in by a black hole. As the ground beneath her gets swallowed, she is able to get one last chance to look at the sun rise above the horizon.



Finalists

15-19

Aislin Tse

17. WHAT'S THAT SMELL

“What’s That Smell?” represents experiences faced by Chinese people by those not used to their culture. The background is inspired by fish markets in Hong Kong. It is interesting that the smell and sight of these markets give me nostalgia, while it is not accepted or understood by others.



Painting
390mm x 200mm
\$215

Painting
290mm x 215mm
\$250



Aislin Tse

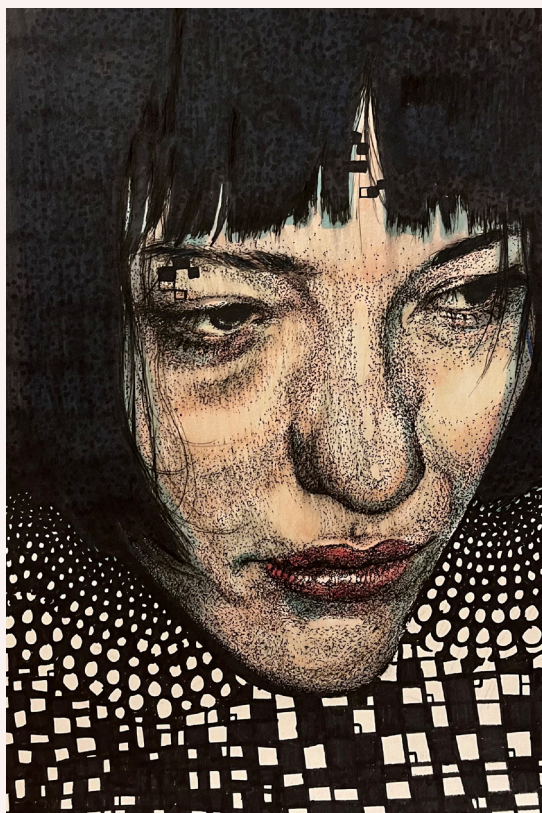
18. OPEN YOUR EYES

“Open Your Eyes” spreads awareness of the experiences I faced growing up Asian in New Zealand. The painting stems from a memory of walking into my primary school classroom and my classmates pulling their eyes at me. I only understood how wrong it was years later.

Amelia Prestidge

19. MODERN EXISTENCE

Modern Existence explores how technology is changing the way we see ourselves. Parts of the figure break into pixels, blurring the line between human life and the digital world. The tired expression reflects the loneliness that exists despite being constantly connected to others.



Drawing
320mm x 440mm x 50mm
\$450

Amjayden Tafatoa Mauga

20. ECHOS OF HERITAGE

This art piece/source of carvings showcases the different aspects of Samoa and how I've come to realise and see the beauty in daily life in Samoa. From the fancy airport to the more grounded aspects of working in the umukuka and the loud market.



Woodcut
300mm x 350mm
\$250

Sculpture, Clay
230mm x 110mm
\$150



Anika Worthington-McBride

21. MATA RUA

Mata Rua shows the connection between wahine me, tane through pukana. My identity has been squashed and stretched between two labels that haven't always fit. Maori tanga helps me express the comfortable and uncomfortable through things like this pukana.

Woodcut
590mm x 520mm
\$125



Annah Lyne

22. UNTITLED

This woodcut print is inspired by Shane Cotton, using his unique art style to explore my own identity. For my vase, I use aspects that deeply resonate with me: my mountain, Kapiti Island, two fantails that represent communication and guidance as well as the Māori patterns I incorporated symbolising growth and connection.

Axl Zhang

23. THE POISE OF BLUE

This painting explores elegance and composed stillness through the varying hues of blue and gestural expression.



Painting, Oil Paint
400mm x 500mm x 20mm
\$5,000

Betty Shen

24. HOME

This painting depicts a girl looking mischievously back at a burning house. She smiles despite the alarming scene. The landscape is hers to conquer.



Painting
500mm x 400mm x 18mm
\$1,000

Charcoal, Pencil, & Powder Sketching
594mm x 841mm
\$999



Cathy Shiyu Liu

25. STARS

Stars can shine so brightly, but only to ones that dare step on to the stage.

Oil Painting
50mm x 40mm
\$125



Charlotte Ching Yu Zhao

26. STAND OUT

Stand Out is inspired by how people often follow trends and end up looking the same. I wanted to show that being yourself is something to be proud of. The girl's bright colours against the grey background represent how cool it is to stand out.

Charlotte Finkle

27. TIDES OF FLIGHT

My piece is about connecting with nature. I was inspired by Aotearoa's scenery and my own tendency to overlook its beauty, instead spending my time indoors.



Painting
295mm x 418mm x 20mm
\$500

Chenshuo Yuwen

28. BETWEEN ROOTS AND CIRCUITS

My artwork represents the connection between humanity, nature, and technology. Flowers, wildlife, and machinery intertwine to show that progress does not have to replace nature. Instead, I hope to encourage viewers to imagine a future where innovation and the environment exist in harmony and support one another.



Drawing
297mm x 420mm
\$279

Acrylic on Servings Tray, with Resin Layer
180mm x 360mm x 30mm
\$500



Deonna Qu

29. VERDANT HAVEN

This painting is part of my collection Silver Lining. The idea of painting on serving trays emerged from an exploration project at school. By transforming second-hand trays sourced from op shops into artworks, I aim to give these overlooked objects a new purpose and a second chance to be appreciated and used.

Oil Based Colouring Pencils
& Soft Pastels
420mm x 297mm x 30mm
\$700



Ellie Yang

30. ONE MORE MEAL

Adapted from a photo of my grandpa eating fried rice, from my “Around a Table” theme on mundane moments. Using coloured pencils and pastels, I layered colour to build realism, highlighting his skin’s rough textures: blackheads, freckles, scars. Honouring his sacrifices. Green and purple accents deepened the tone, evoking nostalgia, love, and security.

Gemma Wong

31. RISING RABBIT

Rising Rabbit explores Chinese culture's online rise, healing yet frustrating, since it's often embraced as an aesthetic trend rather than respected heritage. The overexposed white paint symbolises a sudden spotlight; blended background areas show shallow, appearance-based acceptance. Referencing zodiac backlash, the piece insists no animal is "better"; you don't get one, you are it.



Painting
400mm x 500mm x 15 mm
\$450

George Moule

32. DISJOINT

This series was an expression of how stress can lead to separation and isolation, even around the people closest to you.



Photography
297mm x420mm
\$250

Painting, Digital Illustration
420mm x 297mm x 1mm
\$400



Heaven Santos

33. AT DREAM'S EDGE

My work delves into the uncontrollable need for escapism. Often times, people would like to reminisce about their younger days, a time of youth and freedom. Some people take it even further, trying to relive these memories, in hopes of shielding their eyes from reality. I used acrylic and Krita software.

Drypoint Etching
320mm x 150mm
\$250



Jack Olson-Carsons

34. PAUSE INFINITY

These two pictures are meant to represent the passing of time and how the reflection of action makes it feel like life is on pause.

Jasmine Couper

35. TWILIGHT INNOCENCE

This piece was originally a cinematic inspired by the music video KARMA from Alien Stage, but then developed into a tribute to the dog in the photograph, Roxy, who passed away not long after taking the photo. This piece brings together the innocence and relationship between man and dog.



Photograph
420mm x 297mm
\$125

Jay Jay Xu

36. COLOURFUL GLOVES

This painting is based on a photo of me as a toddler, showing what I was wearing in front of the camera. I have tried to capture the joy I felt back then. You can probably tell that 6-year-old me could never be any happier than being seen with a panda hat and vibrant-coloured gloves.



Painting
297mm x 408mm
\$500

Watercolour
270mm x 385mm x 1mm
\$250

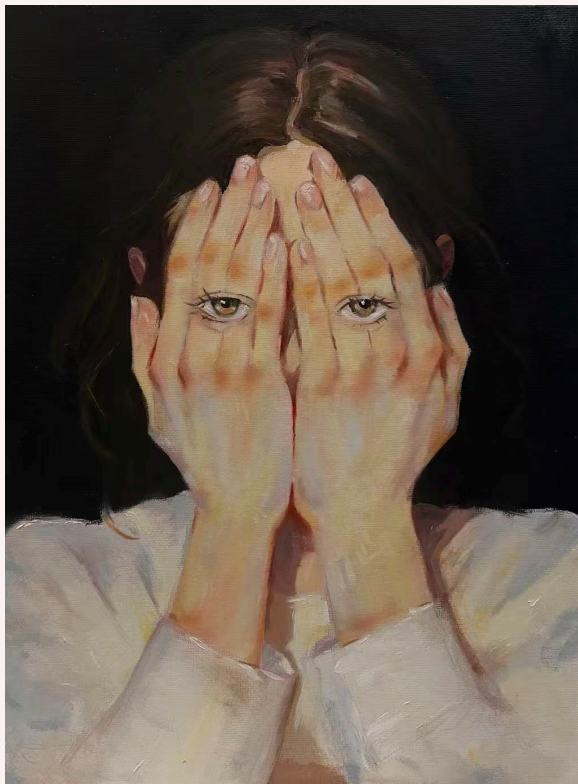


Jessica Jin

37. PARROTS WITHIN THE LEAVES

This piece of vibrant parrots is inspired by New Zealand's rich and unique natural environment. These parrots were often seen in my local area, and through this artwork, I wanted to celebrate the beauty and diversity of our natural wildlife through this piece.

Oil on Canvas
300mm x 400mm x 30mm
\$550



Kasey Ying

38. GUARDED

I have decided to name this piece Guarded because of how the painting acknowledges the difference between seeing and being seen. Through oil painting techniques, I aimed to capture the essence of fragility. I also sought to blend the eyes smoothly enough to elevate the core idea of self-protection.

Kyra Alkamil

39. THE AFTERPARTY

The Afterparty captures that strange in-between where energy lingers, but meaning has already faded. Bodies overlap in a crowded room; blurred faces dissolve individuality. No one is fully present, not even to themselves. This anonymity reflects social erasure, spaces where connection is performed rather than truly felt.



Oil on Canvas
560mm x 710mm x 20mm
\$1,000

Acrylic Painting
297mm x 420mm x 3mm
\$125



Lara Hawley

40. MILK AND MUDDY WATERS

This painting personifies a wild, powerful river as a teenage girl in Aotearoa, reflecting my own identity. Agricultural surveying cuts through her, hair tightly braided to symbolise industrialised constraint. A sun halo highlights her life-giving importance as she nurtures a cow and wears a trade-symbolising possum blanket, accepting change.

Lucy Xu

41. CYANEIDAE

Dreams can be vivid or blurry, yet always dreamlike. The figures in this artwork are human-shaped jellyfish born from my imagination, prototyped on the Arctic's Cyanea capillata, the Lion's Mane Jellyfish. Jellyfish embody dreams perfectly: to me, they're the mothers of all water, dissolving silently into a puddle after death, just like a dream fading.



Drawing, Illustration
210mm x 297mm
\$1,000

Maximilian Kind

42. THE LAST WHALE

Humans have been progressing rapidly, and as we do, we destroy what came before. Species still exist in conventional terms, but they've become entirely reliant on humanity, prisoners of existence, held captive by their own destroyers. This piece explores that paradox: our simultaneous drive to destroy and to preserve and protect.



Watercolour & Pen Drawing
400mm x 300mm x 15mm
\$250



Oil Painting
560mm x 810mm x 35mm
\$3,000

Melanie Roberts

43. THE FLOW OF LUDUS

Cupid's arrow releases a strange, watery liquid onto marble, freeing two statues trapped in the Louvre's Cour Marly. Red marks only skin and arrow, set against purple and ultramarine tones. Curved edges pull viewers inside; an emptier left side invites imagination. The central statue, though Bouguereau-inspired, doesn't exist in reality.

Drawing, Coloured Pencil
155mm x 205mm x 1mm
\$2,000



Nanami Hayter

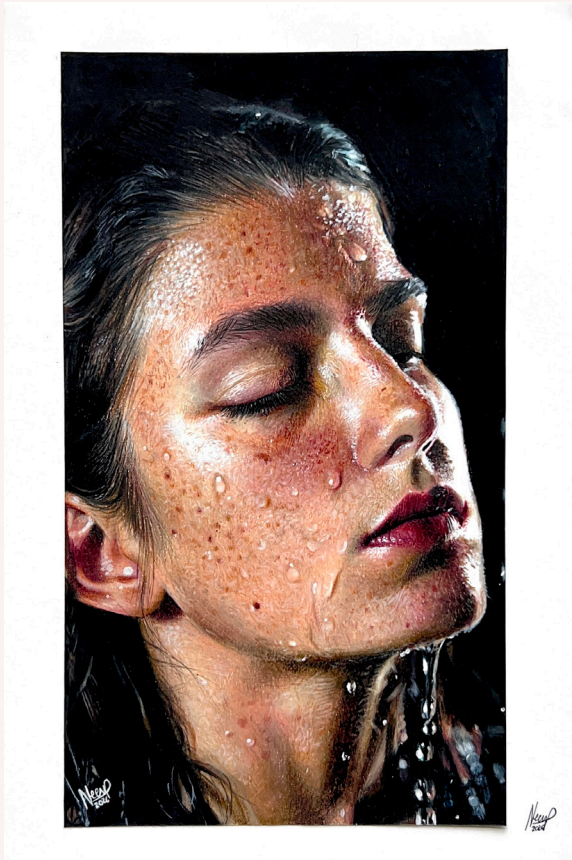
44. HINAMATSURI

This artwork is based on my childhood as a mixed child. I captured Hinamatsuri dolls, which are part of the Girls' Festival in Japan. I obsessed over every detail to evoke a sense of elegance and growing maturity as a young woman.

Neev Panchal

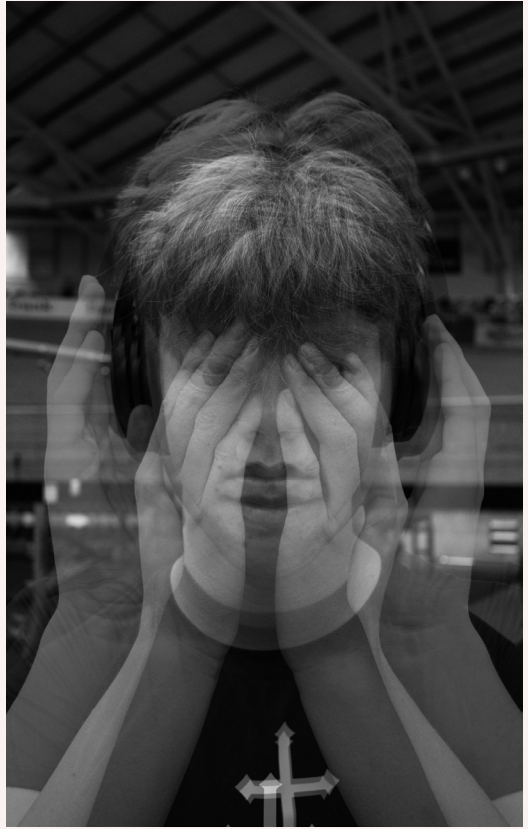
45. RELIEF

This artwork was finished a day before my 16th birthday, and I made it as a final statement piece as a 15-year-old. I wanted to create one final piece as a 15-year-old to display everything I had learnt up until that moment.



Drawing, Coloured Pencil
210mm x 290mm x 2mm
\$200

Digital Photograph
297mm x 420mm
\$150



Noah Kline

46. COMPLEXITY

This photograph explores the external and internal layers of identity and can reveal the contrast between how a person feels within themselves and how they present to the world. Through this visual symbolism, the image communicates hidden emotions, values, memories, and social expectations, showing identity as complex, evolving, and deeply personal.

Poppy Buller

47. EVERY CHILD NEEDS PEACE AND HOPE

Many children are deprived of peace and hope. The worry angel figurine can be slept with, relieving stress and providing protection, capturing unnecessary suffering. The work depicts a moment of serenity, which all children on earth deserve, to live in a peaceful world where they can be truly free, loved and have hope for a better future.



Acrylic on Paper
490mm x 450mm
\$2,000

Riko Kojima

48. FAMILIAR MEMORIES

Being born in Japan, scenes like this were part of everyday life. Lanterns, signs, and busy streets are small details that often go unnoticed, yet hold strong memories for me. They remind me that identity is shaped not only by big events, but by the ordinary places and routines we grow up with.



Graphite on 230gsm
210mm x 297mm
\$2,000

Oil Painting
605mm x 760mm x 15mm
\$300



Ronald Wang

49. THE WORLD IS SERVED

This is the second artwork in my series The World is a Make-Shift Circus. The World is Served depicts animals gathered around a cake symbolising influence, power, and desire. Each follows their own rules for dividing it, hidden behind performance, revealing ambition, greed, and the hierarchy between bystanders and decision-makers.

Acrylic Painting
260mm x 380mm
\$1,000



Sophia Davies

50. AS SEEN BY ARTIFICIAL LIGHTS

Lit only by the artificial light of the laptop screen, this self-portrait acts as a metaphor for the reliance of personal identity on external validation. Are you still there when the laptop turns off? When the outside world disappears, what defines you? What brings you out of the dark?

Summer James

51. THE VOID

It's always there, waiting, waiting to stab my stomach again and again, until nothing's left to feel. All I can do is stay in bed. When it fades, I'm just a shell: can't breathe, can't feel, can't see. Consumed. Alone in a dark void.



Acrylic on Paper
400mm x 300mm
\$200

Xinyi Zhu

52. ME

This oil painting is my self-portrait. The deep red background creates an atmospheric mood, while the crane embroidery on the garment blends Chinese elegance with a quiet, introspective gaze that reveals my serene thoughts. This painting is a presentation of my identity.



Painting
420mm x 650mm
\$2,000

Photography
320mm x 320mm x 20mm
\$125



Xinyu Jiang

53. VISIBLE GIRL

Skateboarding has long been perceived as a male-dominated sport. By focusing on the female skater and framing male skaters in the background, this photograph conveys a sense of empowerment and reverses the conventional power dynamic.

Oil on Paper
420mm 297mm
\$240



Xiyan (Lily) Hu

54. MOTHER AND MAHJONG

My mother often gathers with her friends on the weekends to play mahjong, a Chinese tile-based game. I have always been intrigued by how much they value these gatherings and the significant role it plays in their friendships. I wanted to capture the beauty of human connection through traditional cultural activities.

Yeonwoo Oh

55. IGNORANCE

Inspired by the murals of Dean Cornwell and Frank Brangwyn, my artwork depicts the issues of hyper-individualism that promote the destruction of pathways for future generations. This is to say that focusing on individuality weakens our sense of community, dismantling the social homogeneity that allows us to fight against corruption.



Colour Pencil Drawing
& Watercolour
297mm x 420mm
\$120

Watercolour
297mm x 420mm
\$280



Yihan Liu

56. LISTENING TO THE LIVING EARTH

This artwork explores the peaceful connection between humans and nature. Using soft watercolors and muted tones, it depicts a girl, plants, and animals coexisting harmoniously. Delicate textures highlight nature's fragile beauty, while the composition encourages reflection on the companionship, warmth, and wonder found in observing the living world.

Finalists

20-25

Painting
900mm x 900mm x 18mm
\$8,125



Blake Aitken

57. PASSAGE (WITH AND WITHOUT YOU)

The distance between a father and his daughter. The grid represents 27,000 kilometres driven to remain present in her life: the hours, days and fuel required to sustain a relationship across separation. Her sleeping figure, turned away from me, reflects a distance that cannot be measured.

Hannah Huggan

58. BITE

Something I love about photography is capturing domestic intimacies, catching people at these odd moments (like my girlfriend brushing her teeth in the laundry room). There's a sweet honesty there. The hat, the laundry powder, the irritated look; it means a lot to me.



Photograph
240mm x 350mm
\$800

Jessie Randles

59. SUBVERSIONS OF FREEDOM

Exploring pharmaceutical debris through a deconstructed birth control package acknowledges how Western hormonal control alters ancestral bodily rhythms, alongside colonial disruption to the autonomy of whenua. The box's folds reveal memory of past function, parallel to traces of bodily and environmental grief, where control and separation linger through subversions of freedom.



Drawing
140mm x 190mm
\$400

Sculpture
400mm x 500mm x 200mm
\$395



Jimmy Crawford

60. EXPERIMENTS IN BRONZE #4

In this sculpture, I have used a 2,200-year-old piece as a base to experiment with techniques. I developed a process that allows me to use Genuine Bronze to achieve Verdigris finishes with depth, texture, and real presence. It took multiple weeks of work with various chemicals to achieve.

Painting, Acrylic on Canvas
500mm x 700mm x 35mm
\$3,500



Nyle Turuwhenua

61. HE MAŌRI AHAU

“He Māori Ahau” is a self-portrait set within my weaving room. The work reflects on identity, belonging, and my experience growing up Māori with fair skin, navigating expectations of what it means to be Māori. It affirms that identity is not determined by appearance; whakapapa is enough.

Portia Roper

62. BRYCE

My work explores morphing animals, merging segments until creatures become one, stitched together like something Dr. Frankenstein might create. Making these hybrids, I control their strangeness: crazy, funny, creepy, weird. I imagine them alive, how they move, sound, eat, survive. I invite viewers to ask these same questions and let imagination take over.



Collage & Embroidery
320mm x 440mm x 45mm
\$350

Santiago Mora

63. PLANK THE RATE OF FLOW

On and on the pile grows.



Mixed Media
304mm x 254mm x 304mm
\$1,100



Acrylic on Canvas
900mm x 1,215mm
x 304mm
\$777

Stevie Fiske

64. WHEN YOU LOOK AT ME, WHAT DO YOU SEE?

This work was born out of my journey of struggling to accept myself as transgender. As the nation seeks to define a person by their biological sex assigned at birth, this piece stands truer than ever. Tell me, when you look at me, is that all that you see?

THANK YOU

The Waikato Society of Arts is proud to present the National Youth Art Awards 2026, a celebration of youth creativity from right across Aotearoa New Zealand. This year we received a record-breaking 517 entries from young artists nationwide, across three age categories: 13–14, 15–19, and 20–25 years. This remarkable turnout reflects the depth of creative talent and passion within our youth community, and we are honoured to showcase their work.

Our sincere thanks go to judges Aisha Roberts and Tyrone Te Waa, who faced the incredible task of selecting just 64 finalists from 517 entries. Their expertise, care and thoughtful consideration made this exhibition possible, and we are deeply grateful for the time and dedication they brought to such a challenging process.

To the teachers, parents and friends who encouraged, supported and championed these young artists: thank you. Your belief in their creativity is the foundation on which this award stands.

We extend our gratitude to everyone who contributed to bringing this exhibition to life — from installation to promotion to the many hands behind the scenes.

Our heartfelt thanks also go to our volunteers, the WSA Executive, and staff, whose dedication and hard work to make this award possible. It is a privilege for us to hold the National Youth Art Awards annually, and that privilege rests firmly on your commitment and support.

Finally, a special thank you to our sponsors. Their generous and ongoing support makes this award possible, and without their major contributions, the National Youth Art Awards simply could not take place. We are grateful for their recognition of just how important art is for young people, and for the role it plays in building a thriving, connected community.

To every artist who entered, from all corners of the country, congratulations and thank you for sharing your vision with us.

Ngaa mihi nui,

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